

# Building Powerful Partnerships with Families

## Transforming Your Old Title I School-Parent Compacts into Effective Action Plans

### Connecticut School - Family - Community Partnerships

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- [The School-Family Compact Project published in Educational Leadership journal](#)

## Turn Title I compacts into dog-eared documents

Connecticut's School-Family Compact project was highlighted in Title1Admin.com. Schools in Middletown and Bridgeport shared their experiences and tips for revitalizing Title I compacts.

### **Key points:**

- Link goals to grade-level strategies
- Rally families, teachers around a common vision
- Let revitalized compacts create a snowball effect

*Republished from Title1Admin.com*

## **Turn Title I compacts into dog-eared documents**

Somewhere from a back room, a Title I compact emerges. It's passed out to parents who squint at miniscule lines of suggested strategies. Everyone signs on the dotted line, and a copy is filed and forgotten somewhere in the back room.

Or that's how things used to be in Bridgeport (Conn.) Public Schools. As in many places, the district had cookie cutter compacts, said Dolores Mason, the district's National Network of Partnership Schools facilitator.

Then, the district joined the state's pilot study on revitalizing Title I compacts. The approach includes gathering feedback, linking to school improvement goals, and providing parents with grade-level strategies.

Now, Connecticut is rolling out the voluntary process statewide and offering its districts regional technical assistance. Lessons learned in Bridgeport and other pilot districts are included on a new website along with resources to guide Title I schools nationwide.

The effort is led by Anne T. Henderson, a senior consultant for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Judy Carson, who heads up the Connecticut State Department of Education's School-Family-Community Partnerships Project, and state education consultant Patti Avallone. Avallone's past experience as a Title I director and principal with New Haven (Conn.) Public Schools helped the team fine-tune the compact project's 10-step process, and she worked to provide direct support to participating schools, Carson said.

"Before, schools would just create a compact and they would kind of put it on the shelf," said Donna Marino, partnership coordinator for Middletown (Conn.) Public Schools. "Now we've given it legs."

### **Change the conversation**

Educators told Title1Admin® they believe Title I compacts hold the potential to help schools succeed despite steep challenges, and their districts reflect those challenges faced by Title I districts and schools across the nation.

Bridgeport's free or reduced-price lunch eligibility percentage stands at nearly 100 percent. The mobility rate in one Middletown school is such that a third of the school's population shifts annually, Marino said. Over in West Haven Public Schools, Forest School has an increasing Spanish-speaking population. Unemployment and foreclosures mean a steady stream of new student registrations and withdrawals, said Principal Thomas Hunt.

Family hardships, language barriers, and other challenges can put a damper on school-home partnerships. However, by rethinking your compact, you can change the conversation between staff and parents and the school's entire approach to families, they said.

Their compacts now directly connect to school improvement goals. Linking compacts to goals and gathering

feedback to develop strategies shifts a school's entire family engagement approach, Hunt said. "It went

from  
that promissory note of parents getting their kids to school to how can we as a school help you as parents  
at  
home?" he said.

## **Partner strategically**

The new compact approach lets teachers and parents work together more specifically and strategically, Marino added. For example, at Hunt's school, teachers created activity packets to provide resources aligned with the compact goals for each grade level. They reformatted back-to-school night to share academic skills in greater detail. Compacts changed from rarely used documents that list a million "we think you should" items for parents to ones that explicitly list in everyday language the five things a child ought to know when he leaves fourth grade, and the five things he'll learn in fifth grade, Marino said. In short order, everyone focuses on strategies, such as ways to support reading comprehension skills, rather than expectations, such as getting your child to bed early, Mason explained. The compact is turning student achievement around, she said. "People are finally getting it."

### **Related Story:**

Compacts 101: Target needs, gather feedback

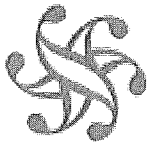
Here are pointers on revitalizing Title I compacts from educators who participated in Connecticut's pilot study.

- Prioritize first; brainstorm second. Look at data for specific needs at various grade levels or grade spans. These needs should be reflected in your school improvement goals. Once you've prioritized needs, you're ready to brainstorm potential strategies.
- Organize feedback. Create a system for having grade-level or subject-area leaders gather ideas from other teachers. Organize those ideas along with ones from parents and others. Narrow down based on which strategies for each grade level best address improvement goals.
- Build staff buy-in. Involve staff in meetings where parents share ideas. This helps staff hear parents' interest in helping. Underscore that revamping Title I compacts isn't more work; it's a tool to support classroom instruction.
- Go big or don't bother. Turn your compact into a handy format, like a brochure, and then take every chance to mention it. Think open house, annual Title I meetings, parent-teacher conferences, family nights, websites, and newsletters. Don't market it in boring ways, such as, "Come to our Title I compact meeting." Be sneaky and tuck it into fun events.

*Sources:* Thomas Hunt, principal, Forest School, West Haven (Conn.) Public Schools; Donna Marino, partnership coordinator, Middletown Public Schools; and Dolores Mason, National Network of Partnership Schools facilitator, Bridgeport Public Schools.

Tricia Offutt covers family and community engagement and other Title I issues for LRP Publications.  
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